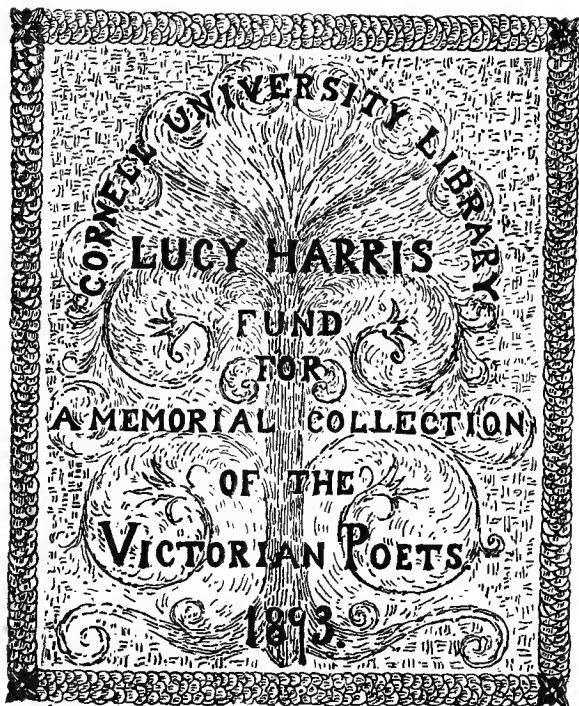


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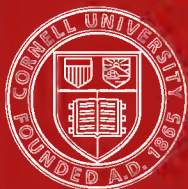
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THE SONG OF THE GOLDEN BOUGH
AND OTHER POEMS.

THE SONG
OF THE
GOLDEN BOUGH
AND OTHER POEMS BY
CARYL BATTERSBY
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WESTMINSTER
ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE & CO.
1898

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PREFACE.

The author takes this opportunity of acknowledging the courtesy by which he is permitted to reprint in this volume certain poems which have already appeared in *Good Words*, *Longman's Magazine*, the *Parents' Review*, the *Spectator*, and *Temple Bar*.

THE SONG OF THE GOLDEN BOUGH.

I heard the sentence of the clan,
And turned and went, a roofless man,
 Into the unforgiving night ;
 Thick in the air a hovering flight
Of curses followed as I ran.

Undaunted, dauntless, on I fled ;
The moon before me weltered red,
 Half-sunken in a swathe of cloud ;
 The ghosts swirled past me in a crowd,
Or squeaked like bats around my head.

I feared them not. Far off, the fox
Barked from his cavern in the rocks;
Beside me through the bracken slipt
A leering wolf, with hunger nipt,
Bound for the valley and the flocks.

Then darkness wrapt the moon; the rain
Thrashed down from heaven upon the plain;
With hands that groped before my face,
I rushed and reeled from place to place,
The storm-wind thundering through my brain.

So close the dark about me prest
That north and south and east and west
I told not, but my heart of pride
Even in that hour the gods defied,
And bade them rave and scourge their best.

The wind's note changed ; it seemed the din
Of breaking seas ; the rain fell thin ;
By these two signs I knew I stood
Hard on the fringes of a wood ;
I laughed, and softly entered in.

With wary step I trod the mold
And mosses of that forest old ;
Against my face thronged startled wings,
Over my feet wet woodland things
Crawled blind and sluggish, vexed with cold.

The storm grew weak ; the moon soared free,
Disrobed of tempest ; I could see
The veined branches interlace
Across the silver of her face :
Then calm and sleep laid hold on me.

Amid the draggled fern I lay,
And took my slumber, till the day
 From leaf to leaf dropt slowly down
 Grey fingers feeling through the brown
To warn me it was death to stay.

Where was not death? My plan was laid;
With fox-like foot from shade to shade
 Of that grim underwood I past,
 And still my eyes were upward cast,
And almost in my heart I prayed.

And what I sought at length I won—
A bough that glistened in the sun;
 Its leaves were all of crinkling gold,
 Its very touch was deathly cold,
Its threads of human fate were spun..

I climbed and pluckt it ; then I strode
From out the shadows, took the road
That dipt to where a temple stood,
Its lintel purple-splashed with blood,
Its hidden dark the priest's abode.

I cried within the ring of stone :
' Come forth, thou priest, I stand alone,
' Alone against thy gate I stand,
' The golden bough is in my hand,
' And thou must fight to keep thine own.

' The gods, men say, love best the strong ;
' And thou art old, hast served them long ;
' They bid thee to thy trial now,
' They send me with this sacred bough,
' Lest toothless prayers should do them wrong.'

6 THE SONG OF THE GOLDEN BOUGH

The gate upon its hinges veered ;
With gleaming sword the priest appeared ;
 ‘And thou,’ he shouted, ‘who art thou ?’
I answered not, but raised the bough,
And flung it in his whitened beard.

He whirled the gleaming sword ; I leapt
Beneath it as it downward swept ;
 With breast to breast and hip to hip
 I strained him in a deadly grip,
Then cast him from me, and he slept.

His garments round my limbs I threw ;
Athwart his throat the sword I drew,
 Shearing his head off ; next I took
 The priest’s horn from its hiding-nook,
And at the wood’s edge stood, and blew.

As fowls come when the corn is cast,
The village-folk came crowding fast;
They trembled when they saw me there
Clad priest-like, and amidst my hair
The golden leaves; I spoke at last:

‘But yesternight you would have trod
‘My flesh and bones into the sod;
‘To-day my star surmounts your hate,
‘I bear the shining branch of fate,
‘Your priest am I, your voice to God.

‘You drove me forth, but heaven, more just,
‘Requites me with this holy trust;
‘Your little lives are at my beck,
‘My foot is planted on your neck;
‘Bow down in silence to the dust.

‘ You doubt me ? Lo, these hands are red
‘ With slaughter of the priestly dead ;
 ‘ And see ! ’ My robes apart I flung,
 And showed them from my girdle hung
The dripping beard, the sightless head.

‘ This is my warrant, this, ’ I cried,
‘ The proof that heaven is on my side ;
 ‘ Henceforth the lightnings at my call
 ‘ On man and beast and crop shall fall,
‘ Be reverence scanted or denied. ’

I ceased and left them. From that day
I am as iron, they as clay ;
 Before my will they bend and break,
 My hatred in their blood I slake,
I name the victim, and I slay.

Their weakness is my robe of might;
Their blindness leads my feet aright;
 Poised in the shadows of their fear,
 My vengeance haunts them, dimly near,
A sword that hovers ere it smite.



THE LAMENT OF NIOBE.

Amphion wooed and won me in the days
When Pan made shepherd music on the hill,
And Love walked singing in the open ways,
With eyes unblinded still.

I was the daughter of a king, and he
Heir to a kingdom. Ah ! those happy years,
Wherein we lived and loved beside yon sea
That now receives my tears !

I bore him children glad and strong and fair,
With voices like a bird's voice in the spring,
With faces like the face of flowers, and hair
Bright as the golden ring

Their grandsire wore. I see them even now—
My children—running on the soft wet sands,
Or in the orchard leaping at some bough
That rises from their hands,

Then earthward flings a ruddy-fruited rain
About them laughing.—Visions of the past !
Visions that for a little lull the pain
Wherein my soul is cast !

I was a tender mother, but unwise,
Still musing on my children all day long,
Because they were so comely to the eyes,
So joyous and so strong.

My soul forecast no misery. Not then
Had I been taught how out of gladness flow
As drear disasters on the lives of men
As ever spring from woe.

And thus, all heedless, round my life I drew
The curtains of my dream, and let my pride
Grow even as my children's beauty grew,
And yearn for things denied,

Till in the end I braved the gods and spake :—

‘O Zeus, who art the ruler of us all,
‘If fair Latona for her children’s sake
‘Treads the celestial hall ;

‘If she, because Apollo is her son,
‘And Artemis her daughter, climbs the seat
‘Of worship where the streams of Nilus run
‘Clear-shining in the heat ;

‘Why should not I, the mother of a birth
‘In number more, in beauty equal, claim
‘Room by her side in heaven, and on the earth
‘An everlasting name ?’

I paused ; and with my chin set in my hand
Looked on my children playing.—Suddenly
A darkness gathered over all the land,
And hid the moaning sea ;

Then like the birds whom terror of the sky
Drove windward in a flickering, twittering mass,
Came all my children with a startled cry
Through the deep-flowered grass ;

But one, the youngest-born and loved the best,
Reeled as he ran, and fell with arms outspread ;
And when I caught him upward to my breast,
I knew that he was dead.

O in what words shall I unfold the tale,
The mournful tale which still the folk repeat,
How, one by one, my children, writhing, pale,
Dropt dead around my feet ?

At last I swooned, thrice-happy in my swoon,
Because I deemed it death. I hoped too much ;
The gods were all too wroth to grant such boon
To one whose sin was such.

My life returned. Soft shone the summer sky,
Sweet sang the bird upon the summer bough,
And with a scent of hill-side dittany
The wind blew on my brow.

A while, as one who in the dawning light
Lies betwixt sleep and waking, so I lay;
Then came the thought that was the last at night,
The earliest in the day,

My children; and I looked around to see
If they were near, and looking I descried
Their bodies scattered pale upon the lea
Where they had fallen and died.

Then I remembered all, and rose, and fled,
Fled, never heeding whither,—on, right on,
Away from that grim meadow of the dead,
Those bodies stark and wan.

Wildly I ran beneath yon forest old,
Wildly by jutting root and clinging briar,
Now in the bracken where the snakes lay cold,
Now in dark pool and mire ;

Then up this mount the scourges of my sin
Lashed me and drove me, till at length I fell,
Bleeding and faint, in this lone place, wherein
Age after age I dwell.

And now the rain may drift against my eyes,
The sleety gust swirl round about my form,—
I feel them not, though the scared eagle cries,
A lost thing in the storm.

For I am stone ;—yet by the heavenly will,
My soul endures within this rocky grain,
Still conscious of its love, its guilt, and still
Shot through and through with pain.

Therefore I weep, weep ever, and my tears
Run seaward with a lamentable flow,
So that who listens in the stillness hears
The story of my woe.



PAN AND SYRINX.

There was a secret vale in Arcady,
Wherein grew many a flower sweet to smell,
And many a pleasant shadow of a tree
Darkened the slant sides of the cup-like dell;
And day and night did birds make melody,
And a clear streamlet slipt through fern and brake,
Singing until it ceased within a lake.

And often when the drowsy summer-heat
Had wrought a longing for some little rest,
Here from the chase did Artemis retreat,
With bow unloosened and bare snowy breast;
And maidens following with buskined feet
Trooped through the fern that bathed them to the knee,
While the red staghounds leapt beside in glee.

Now so it happened on a summer's day
When all the earth for very heat did swoon,
That Pan, the god of shepherds, came this way,
Fleeing the burning arrows of the noon.
Ah ! little thought he, as he made delay,
That in this shade his heart should shortly know
A fiercer arrow than the noon can throw.

Pan saw the place, how sweet it was and fair,
How filled with all of woodland ravishment,
How deeply hidden from the flaming air
That flashed upon the uplands, so he went
And found a hiding in the fern, and there
Sank softly into slumber without fears,
The stream growing ever fainter in his ears.

And when a little season he had lain
In the dim shadows of delicious sleep,
He seemed, as in a dream, to hear again
The babble of the water softly creep,
Threading his slumber; then with louder strain
It shaped itself within his drowsy ear
To sound of girlish laughter, silvery, clear.

And Pan, scarce knowing if he were awake,
Lay listening till his ears could doubt no more
That the sweet noise from merry maidens brake,
Down in the little valley's shady core,
And round about the borders of the lake;
Then did he rise and on his elbow lean,
Peering amid the fern-stalks brown and green.

And straight he saw with his black eyes and bold
That many maidens, thinking no one by,
All raimentless and whiter to behold
Than any lily-flower that floated nigh,
Were bathing in the water clear and cold,
While in the throng the goddess Artemis
Stood laughing softly at their gentle bliss.

And some swam where the waters deepest were,
And some stood in the shallows to the knee,
Apparelled in their bright descending hair;
And some, with just their faces water-free,
Seemed like pale flowers sprinkled here and there,
And some with hollowed palms in joyous play
Threw each on other showers of glittering spray.

And tunics whiter than the mountain-snows
Lay on the grass, and buskins crimson-seamed,
And many purple quivers, ashen bows ;
And here and there like sleeping serpents gleamed
Gold girdles that the tender waist enclose ;
The blinking staghounds stretched themselves at ease
In places where the sunshine cleft the trees.

All these things Pan beheld, and yet his sight
Dwelt little on them, being surely led
To one maid only with a fixed delight,
Who seemed the perfect flower of maidenhead,
And no less lovely than her lady bright ;
Yea, Artemis was not more fair than she,
Save for a touch of loftier deity.

A freshness, like the heaven's after rain,
Moved in her shining limbs and golden hair;
The crimson of the dawn had set its stain
Upon her lips that flowered smiles. But there!
I cheat you in my picture; words are vain.
In brief, what seems his love to any man,
That seemed this maiden to the great god Pan.

With thoughts of her his heart lay blossoming
As thick as April bank with daffodils;
For who shall stand against Love's ordering,
That knows no lord and doeth what he wills?
There is not any may achieve this thing,
But all must be his vassals, gods and men,
And lie beneath his feet as Pan lay then.

So Pan denied no pleasure to his eyes,
Letting them feed upon her; and his ears
Did ache with listening for her sweet replies
Unto the many voices of her peers;
And oftentime he heard amid their cries
How that they called her Syrinx, at which name
His pulses fluttered softly like a flame.

No longer than a linnet's song, alas !
Our joys endure. Even while Pan is stirred
With perfect happiness, the maidens pass
From the lake swiftly at their lady's word,
And gather their white raiment from the grass,
And being clad therewith move in a band
Up the vale-side on to the higher land.

Then Pan with close-shut eyes in quiet lay,
Tricking his fancy with a fond deceit
That the bright vision had not slipt away,
And would again before him shine complete,
Were but his eyelids opened to the day ;
The memory of the maidens' voices wrought
An echo in the stillness of his thought.

But when the blessed mood he fain would keep
Through feeding only on itself had died,
He rose and wandered down the gentle steep
Until he gained the grassy waterside,
And there he walked as one walks in a sleep,
And dreamily beheld the darkening lake,
And stept where she had stept for her sweet sake.

And how he spent the dim and dewy night,
And where, he knew not. This alone he knew,
That, when the next moon glittered in the height,
He couched again amid the fern to view
If Artemis would bring her maidens bright
Unto the valley from the upland flame,
And, even as he watched for them, they came.

Thus on that day Pan had his joy again,
And many days thereafter, till he felt
The very pleasure grow to be a pain,
So great his love was. Then to Zeus he knelt
Praying to meet in forest, mount, or plain
Syrinx alone, that he might tell his care.
Zeus heard, and shortly granted him his prayer.

It chanced upon a morning when the sun
Had travelled half the way from east to south,
That Pan went slowly through a forest dun,
Bowing his head and murmuring with his mouth,
And often through his lips a sigh would run;
Pale was his face, and well might any know
That love had housed with him and wrought him woe.

The bird upon the bough, as he passed by,
Hushed not its tune; the bird within the nest
Looked upward with a shining trustful eye;
The speckled serpent stirred not from its rest;
The timid woodmouse took no thought to fly;
The wild fawn knew his step and never ran;
For all the creatures of the field loved Pan.

And as amid the darksome wood he strayed,
Vexing his heart with fruitless dreams of love,
He came unto a little grassy glade,
Where the bright sun a fiery shuttle drove
Through leafage lessened to a netted shade,
And lo ! a sudden vision in the wold,
A snowy shape beneath the flickering gold.

For scarce a man's length from his feet there lay
A maiden gathered into sleep's caress ;
And though, because her face was turned away,
He might not see her fullest loveliness,
Yet in his heart a voice made haste to say :
'This is the answer to thy piteous moan,
For thou hast found sweet Syrinx all alone.'

Then, hardly drawing breath for awe, Pan stole
Through the green grass towards her with soft stir,
And watched her as she slept; and all his soul
Leaned from his eyes to drink its fill of her;
But she unwitting by an oak tree's bole
Lay calmly, with her golden tresses shed
Over the bow and quiver at her head.

‘Alas!’ thought Pan, ‘alas! it may not be
That one so fair will hearken to my vows,
And yield the first-fruits of her lips to me
Who have these goat-limbs and these horned brows.’
And while he mused on this wise bitterly,
A teardrop slowly gathered in its place,
And fell—ah! foolish Pan!—upon her face.

Then Syrinx started to her feet in haste,
And looking round with half-awakened sight,
And seeing a strange figure, swiftly placed
Her hands on bow and quiver in affright,
And drawing forth an arrow backward paced,
Then set it to the string and bent the bow,
And spake these words in trembling voice and low :

‘What shape art thou that darest thus to stand
With horrid looks of love ? Canst thou not see
That I am one of Artemis’ chaste band,
And seeing know that never falls on me
Touch save of maiden with her maiden hand ?
Who and what art thou, bold of heart and eyes ?
Speak, but advance not, else this arrow flies.’

‘Shoot, lady,’ answered Pan, ‘thou canst not kill.

O ! if thou couldst, I were content to die
By those dear hands of thine, and at thy will ;

But on my nature everlastingly
The seal of godhead rests for good and ill.
Alas ! men hold the best that fate can give,
For men are doomed to die, but gods to live.

‘O, Syrinx ! what is love that it can lead

My feet to follow ever after thine ?

Full many a maiden laughs by mount and mead,

Whose lips have bloomed the rosier for mine ;

But I have seen thee, and a noble need

Springs in me for a higher love than theirs,

And softens me, and fills my lips with prayers.

‘Day after day I lurk within the dale,
Where comes at noon the Lady Artemis
With all her maidens; there beneath a veil
Of grass and fern I steal a short sweet bliss
In watching thee; and when the day grows pale,
And thou art gone, I walk by wood and plain,
Longing for noon and wakeful with love’s pain.

‘With bootless sacrifice the shepherd-man
Offers the tender youngling on the height;
With bootless prayer he lifts his voice to Pan,
And still the grey wolf robs the fold by night;
For Love on all my duties sets a ban,
And thou art more than all. O turn thy face,
And give me but one little word of grace!’

And Syrinx as she listened paler grew ;
The bow dropped from her hand, her strength all died ;
While him the fervour of his passion drew
With this last utterance closer to her side ;
But when his voice ceased, then her strength anew
Flashed through her limbs, and with a wild amaze
She shrieked, and fled along the woodland ways.

A little while Pan stood as lost in doubt,
Then over-mastered by his inward pain
Followed upon her steps, with many a shout
Imploring her to turn to him again,
And hear the story of his love told out ;
But Syrinx, quickening as his voice came near,
Sped ever onward with great sobs of fear.

The trees above her bowed themselves to set
Their branching fingers in her wind-blown hair,
The bracken strove to hold her in its net,
The very flowers laid a tender snare;
The bramble tore her limbs with purple fret,
In memory whereof its bloom alway
Hath borne a bloodstain even from that day.

At times the shadows darkened round her flight :
At times beneath a sunny rift she flew,
And glittered for a moment clear and white ;
While ever following with fixed view
Pan ached at heart for love and cruel slight,
And felt through panting breast and straining limb
The fierceness of the chase steal over him.

And now a warmer light began to shine,
A fresher breath to travel with the breeze;
And now they fled beyond the forest-line,
Away from the dark shadow of the trees;
And now they crossed a field of dappled kine,
That lazily looked upward from the grass
In sleepy wonderment to see them pass.

A river at the far end of the mead
Through many a rush went seaward hurrying,
And thither Syrinx hastened with all speed,
For thereof was her father Ladon king,
Who for his love's sake would befriend her need;
Into the stream she leapt and never stayed,
And while Pan watched her from the banks, thus prayed;

‘O father Ladon, in whose streams I stand,
If ever the vowed tresses of my hair
Have duly fallen on thee from this hand,
If for thy daughter thou hast any care,
And any for the chaste and holy band
That swear to love not, hear me now and save,
And make me as these reeds that fringe thy wave !’

And when she ended, Pan crying out amain
‘O Ladon, hearken not !’ rushed in the stream,
And cast his arms about her all in vain,
For she had vanished even as a dream
That mocks the clutches of the wakened brain.
So Syrinx was not ; only in her stead
Green reeds grew upward from the river’s bed.

Then Pan sank trembling by the waterside,
And dipt his face amid the grass to make
A darkness for his sorrow. 'Love,' he cried,
'I have been thy true servant; for thy sake
Have held as nought my godhead and my pride;
And in the end what is my great reward?
My hopes all slain, and I myself the sword.'

And over him lamenting sank the sun,
And over him all night the pale moon wheeled,
And then the dawn broke; still he lay as one
Whom death has stricken lonely in the field,
Save for a murmur now and then begun
Of 'O to be as man and die this day,
For love, the life of life, is gone away!'

And while he sorrowed in this heavy case,
He felt the air to sudden ripples fanned
By a soft wave of pinions round the place,
And on his shoulder fell a gentle hand,
Whereat Pan looking up with joyless face
Beheld the wing-shod Hermes smiling near,
Who in the gods' tongue spake these words of cheer :

‘Arouse thee, Pan, and list what doom I bring !
Thou askest death, and death shall come to thee ;
And it shall chance that sailors wandering
Along the paths of the Ionian sea
Shall hear about the fall of evening,
And nigh to Paxos, a loud voice of dread
Shout over land and sea : “Great Pan is dead.”

‘But many seasons first shall flower and fade,
And thou hast yet a wondrous art to win.
Now hearken to me; thou must rise and wade
Into the stream and pluck the reeds therein
From Syrinx sprung, then set them in due grade
With joints of wax, and down them softly blow,
So shalt thou find a solace for thy woe.”

Then Hermes to the heavenly houses went,
And all according to his words did Pan;
And when throughout the reeds a breath he sent,
A melody along the hollows ran,
Wherein the transformed Syrinx sweetly blent
With what Pan breathed of sadness; so was wrought
A richer tune than ever throbbed in thought.

And thus Pan's sorrow bloomed to great delight
Which he without that sorrow had not known ;
And through all Arcady by vale and height
Pan piped those peerless love-songs of his own,
And oft at noon the shepherd, oft at night,
Would hear a sweetness with the wind go by,
And murmur to himself that Pan was nigh.

And some there are who in these latter days
Have thought to hear Pan piping on the hill
His tender ditties and his love-lorn lays,
For fancy ever worketh at her will,
And leads the heart of man in many ways :
Yet in the end it fell as Hermes said,
And Pan was gathered to the silent dead.

THE PYTHAGOREAN.

I do not deem thee dead, my child,
Though as thou wast thou art no more,
Though summer soft and winter wild
In vain shall seek thee at my door,

Singing because the sun is warm,
Singing because the thrushes sing,
Singing to see the southward storm
Flutter on white and windy wing.

Though thou art cold, and being kist
Dost give no tender kiss again,
And though the pulses of thy wrist,
Like summer brooks for want of rain,

Have ceased their music ; though thine eyes
Are darkened, and thy throat has lost
Its ancient gift of melodies,
Like some sweet linnet's killed by frost ;

Though all the years may not restore
The innocent freshness of thy breath
Upon my cheek, yet none the more
Can I esteem thee given to death.

There is no death, but only change ;
From these, her mortal bands, set free
The soul flies out on wider range,
God's servant still by land and sea ;

. . .

And at His call is clothed afresh
With many shapes that in their time
Drop from her like a broken mesh,
And leave her pure as in her prime.

God hath some need of thee elsewhere ;
Poor men, perchance, in some dark land
Shut from the knowledge of things fair
Lie down beneath a tyrant's hand ;

And God from His eternal keep
Hath looked upon their loveless lot,
Hath seen the eyes that dare not weep,
Hath heard the mouth that crieth not ;

And thou shalt be His nightingale
To sow their barren hearts with song,
And teach them in thy passionate wail
Their voiceless fever and their wrong.

Or haply shrouding truth in night
Some priest usurps the strength of heaven,
And God will have him out of sight,
And unto thee the task hath given,

And thou a lion maned with wrath,
With fierceness clad, with swiftness shod,
Shalt meet him in a secret path,
And slay him with the power of God.

Perhaps with bud and blossom crowned
In every springtime, year by year,
Thy soul shall greet me from the ground,
And on thy leaves a shining tear

Will hang, because I know thee not,
And thou wilt sway through all thy stem
To win my glances to thy spot,
Or kiss at least my vesture's hem ;

Or thou mayst come in human guise
A ruler whom the world reveres;
Or woman holding in her eyes
The perfect knowledge of all tears.

I know not, and I would not know;
For God, the lord of good and ill,
Thinks fit a cloudy veil to throw
Across the secrets of His will.

And so, my best-beloved, farewell,
A long farewell. Enough for me,
Unshaken in this faith to dwell,—
God somewhere else hath need of thee.

THE WERE-WOLF.

The snow lies deep on wood and wold;
The moon is up, a shield of gold;
And all is bare and bright and cold.

O Jesu, keep us! Hark, a cry!
It is the were-wolf passing by,
And howling to the bitter sky.

From set of sun to break of day
He runs abroad, a ghost in gray,
Or lies in wait to seize and slay.

The sheep from out the fold he takes,
The ice with padded foot he breaks,
His thirst within the stream he slakes.

On wind-swept moor, in wooded glen,
And down beside the reedy fen,
He hunts the track of lonely men ;

And some have seen through brake and briar
His eyes, two orbs of mingled fire,
The man's regret, the brute's desire.

His human story none can tell,
Nor by what deed of guilt he fell
Beneath the burden of this spell.

Two in the wood, two on the plain,—
This is the number of his slain,
And still he lusts to strike again.

One night against the gate I spied
The monster sitting, evil-eyed,
His gleaming jaws dropt open wide.

I saw him in the pale moonshine;
He stretched his haggard throat to whine,
The bristles rose on neck and spine.

My heart within me sank, afraid,
And thrice the blessed sign I made,
And loud to Mary Mother prayed.

For well I guessed my little child,
Crying for sickness, had beguiled
The starveling from his barren wild ;

And Mary Mother brought me cheer ;
She smote the beast with flying fear,
And drove him back to moor and mere.

Since then, with terrors overcast,
Through what dark midnights have I past,
Each darker, drearier than the last !

A muffled foot comes up the stair,
Two eyes beside me start and glare,
A hot breath flickers in my hair.

Each day I beg the men to go
With axe and spear and bended bow,
And slay the creature in the snow.

O God, that I might see him dead,
Two arrows piercing eyes and head,
The white beneath him dabbled red !

Then might I lie and take my rest,
My limbs with holy slumber blest,
My little babe against my breast.



THE PRODIGAL'S FAREWELL.

‘A crafty woman,’
Says babbling spite ;
‘Sweeter than human,’
Were nearer right ;
I knew her wholly,
As the wild bee knows
Heart of moly
And core of rose.

'Twas magical daytime,
Matchless night,
March was Maytime,
And darkness light,
When we together
Our laughter hurled
At that bell-wether,
The world, the world.

At last came ending;
We drew apart
With wrench and rending
Of heart from heart;
And the old bell-wether
Bleated its pack
Of fools together
To hail me back.

Now we rub noses,
The world and I,
In the fat closes
Of decency:
But she, all blameless
And undefiled,
Is driven a nameless
Wretch to the wild.

Banish the woman,
Receive the man;
That's the inhuman
Human plan;
But O exempt her,
This one from taint;
I was the tempter,
And she the saint.

Never a claimant
Of you were meet
To touch her raiment,
Or kiss her feet,
For all about her
Is heavenly worth ;
You cannot flout her,
You earth of earth.

Come all together
From east and west ;
Come, old bell-wether,
And bring the rest ;
Let sighs be mingled,
And tear-drops rain ;
The prodigal springald
Is off again.

He stands your debtor
For much, 'tis true,
But husks were better
Than life with you ;
You count him dullard,
Dissolute, crass ;
Your views are coloured
With too much grass.

And so he'll travel,
And if God should
Prove kind, unravel
Some way to good :
And may love speed him !
He means to try
If she can lead him,
That she ! Good-bye.

THE FLUTE-PLAYER.

He paused a while upon the mountain side,
And looking downward through the dark descried
The village windows, evening stars of home,
Gleams from a Paradise to him denied.

A snowy flake, the firstling of its flight,
Flew to his lips. "It is the kiss of night,
The welcome to her gusty revelries,"
He said, then turned toward the homeless height.

And, as he turned, the storm leapt suddenly
Upon him, smote him white from neck to knee,
And round his tingling ears and in his eyes
Lashed like the spindrift of a reeling sea.

Onward he struggled, clutching to his breast,
In the scant shelter of a tattered vest,
His flute, the silver consort of his grief,
The sweet interpreter of life's unrest.

Onward he struggled till at last he fell,
Breathless and blind, too weary to rebel
Against the stern insistence of his doom,
And ready to meet death with "It is well."

Then came the irony that haunts us still ;
The storm passed southward, weakening in its will,
And from their heaven the pale, unruffled stars
Looked on the white-robed silence of the hill.

He rose, a tottering shade above the snow,
And for a little moment saw below
The valley twinkling with those lights of home
That he had known not, and could never know.

He sank and slept ; the heartache and the cold,
He felt them not upon that frozen wold,
For he had entered on a land of dream
Whose dusk horizon winked with stars of gold.

One star was his, the brightest shining there,
A star that shaped itself a roseate square,
A cottage window, filled with light to lead
His homeward footsteps through the darkening air.

He reached the door, ^{and} he raised the latch, and stood
A moment on the threshold. It was good
To see his happiness and yet refrain,
Knowing that he might take it when he would.

The blazing hearth he saw, the waiting chair,
The simple meal set out with cleanly care,
And in their midst, the heart of all the home,
The woman that he loved, still young, still fair.

She heard his step, and hastening from her place
Ran laughing like a child to his embrace,

Then softly drew his head down with her hands,
And kissed him tenderly upon the face.

That kiss was death. A shepherd boy at morn
Found him amid the snow, a thing forlorn,

But smiling still, and on his ragged breast
Clutching the flute that he so long had borne.



FEMINA VICTRIX.

Here we separate ; you must go ;
I would not keep you a moment longer ;
Love is strong in your heart, I know,
But the masterful law of growth is stronger ;
I have taught you all that I have to teach,
Nothing wondrous or superhuman,
The tender trick of a lover's speech,
The simple heart of a simple woman.

This, you think, is the life for you,—
Here in these fields, with scarce a neighbour,
To sing me songs in the morning dew,
And take a kiss for your lyric labour;
Perhaps you see in a pastoral dream
Yourself a Corydon, me a Phyllis,
Simpering over our curds and cream,
Shepherding lambs as white as lilies.

A passable life for me, I own,
But not with a man like you to share it,
For fate appoints you a path alone,
And time will bring you the strength to dare it;
High is the Alp that you must scale,
Where the lights of heaven shine closer, clearer,
But madrigals piped in the love-lorn vale
Will never get you a whit the nearer.

O trust me, love, for a woman's sight
Can read the face of the unborn morrow,
Though sometimes, led by the heart's delight,
Or haply fearing another's sorrow,
She blinks the truth, and across her eyes
Wilfully drops a veil of blindness,
Banishing thought of the grief that lies
Beyond the hour of her foolish kindness.

Ah, well I know that the life with me
Could not for a single day content you,
When God shall open your eyes to see
The hero's work to which he has sent you ;
You would pine for the mountain-tracks afar,
And scorn the calm of the sheltered hollow ;
But now you are free ! And, behold, a star !
It is yours, it moves, you must rise and follow.

NATURE'S REPLY.

The voice of God hath sounded in the ears
Of many men ; theirs is the happier fate.
But thou, less favoured, who amidst thy tears
Hast scanned the riddles of thy present state,
And brought them, child-like, unto Nature's knee,
Turn not in wrath away,
Because I have no answer ; it may be
That on some chosen day
God will at length reveal himself through me.

Wouldst thou have voices quiring down the wind
 Soft syllables and clear,
To ease the noble torments of thy mind ?
 Dost thou desire to hear
Oracular hymnings from the salty deep,
And, lest thy hopes should sleep,
See graven on the air
Bold parables against despair,
And lines of gracious promise drawn
On every little leaf that shades thy lawn ?

I cannot say if thou shalt win such things :
 But God is merciful, and knows
That not all minds ascend on spiritual wings
 To the eternal snows.
God may ennoble mortal sense,
 Step after step may guide its way
Through my dark caves and thickets dense
 To His unclouded day ;
Then, looking backward, men shall see
God's will, a flaming legend, traced on me,
And life's solution in my outstretched hand,
Had they but known to read and understand.

ON THE HILL.

This is God's wilderness, unploughed, unsown,
Deep in green turf, and here and there beset
With knots of gleaming rush, all one way blown
By the unrelieved fret
Of tyrannous sea-winds. Overhead, the sky
Leaps wide from hill to hill,
Blue, infinite, and still,
Deathless above this world of things that die.

Ah me, how far away
Are all the sights and sounds of yesterday,—
The furnace capped with bickering flame;
The fixed smoke, whose red-lit underglow
Seems like a blush of shame
For heavens deflowered of crystal noon,
White stars and daffodil moon,
And clouds of piled snow.

Gone are the long gray leagues of stone,
The blind misfeatured street,
Still clattering with the enslaved feet
Of those who speed on errands not their own.
Gone is the tireless drone
Of wheels that whirr by pallid faces
In dim ghost-ridden places,
Where strength of man and beauty of maid
Into the crucible are cast,
To come forth gold at last
For the gluttoned hands of trade.

Were it not well,
Divorced from all the uncleanness of the town,
Here on this sinless slope to dwell,
Weaving as in a crown
Flowers from the heart of solitary days,
And stars pluckt on the height
Where the soul walks by night,
God holding, lest she founder in amaze ?

Untouched by mortal gladness, mortal grief,
Here might one rest, sunk in the murmurous grass,
And let the soul sway lightly as a leaf
Amid the rhythms that wake and stir and pass ;
Here, dimly brooding, find
The lark's thought, when the mother and the nest
Are all forgot, and he beyond the wind
Unlocks the silver fountain of his breast ;
Here learn the burden of the moorland bee,
Here from the brown throat of the peaty rill
Draw forth its babbled mystery ;

Yea, and with these each lamb's bleat on the hill,
Each piping insect's cry,
And every voice that falters to the sky
Should blend their meanings, till at last
Deep-surging, secular, vast,
Burst on the ear in one full orb of sound
The music of God's heart, the strain
To which this earth moves, and the listening train
Of all the stars with bright allegiance crowned.



LOVE'S SUPPLIANT.

Put on thy flying sandals, Love, draw near,
Illumine earth and sea
With rich interpretations, showing thee;
For I grow sordid with thy want; my ear
Confounds the flowing ditties of the wind,
Makes' mutiny of music, and doth find,
Because thou art not here,
A disenchantment to annul the tune
Of the million-throated nightingale,
That is the sorrow in the voice of June.

Without thy kisses, Love, the world grows pale,
And for this cause the green-apparelled hills
Do lack their robe of glory, and the deep
Crawls up his sandy sills
In misty desolation, bound with sleep;
And wood and field are desert; and the flowers,
Missing the invocation of their prime,
Thy soft voice calling through the early showers,
Fret death upon their beauty ere the time;
And I mourn daily, grayer than with years,
Because the shreds of this world's loveliness
Fall swifter than my tears;
And only thou, O Love, canst bring redress,
And yet thou dost not; O relent and hear,
And hasten, Love,
O hasten, hasten, Love, draw near.

THE NIGHT TRAIN.

I stand upon the platform, and behold
The faces in the many-windowed train,
Weird faces all, the happiest touched with pain,
The youngest with some hint of growing old;
Each by inexorable fate controlled,
They linger here a moment, then again
Drift out beyond the darkness and the rain
To unimagined issues, dooms untold.
The engine shrieks, the faces pass and go,
They die,—for I shall see them nevermore,
Or if perchance I see them, fail to know;
And now they are gone, as, when the great winds roar,
A swarm of gnats floats out confusedly
To helpless drowning in the unknown sea.

A FORECAST.

When I am old, dishevelled, lean and bent,
And move, a thin poor shadow of to-day,
With staff-propt steps along the garden way,
And in the sunshine rest a while, content
To blink against the bright, blue firmament,
And nod myself to slumber; when decay
Has left me nought to think on, nought to say,
And life sits waiting for its last event
With infinite pathos; even in that sad time
Some woman, reading in this little book,
Writ in the honeymoon of love and rhyme,
May bend above me with compassionate look,
And on my silver hair one kiss bestow,
Because I sang of women long ago.

BEFORE SLEEPING.

Now is the dead of night, and I must sleep ;
But first, my soul, if thou dost aught recall
Wherein thou hast done ill, I bid thee weep,
And pray God's tender mercy on thee fall ;
Purge thyself clean of whatso bitter hate
Thou hast for them that wrong thee ; sink thy pride,
Nor deem thou standest in a higher state
Than those whom God thy happier chance denied.
Be all for heaven ; think life draws near the close ;
Give to repentance thy last conscious breath ;
For more and more this mortal weakness grows
That pledges thee to take the form of death,
And sleep a while. What if in dreams the door
Of life should shut, and thou return no more ?

AT DAWN.

Bold, jubilant blackbird, whistling in the boughs,
When the desired beginnings of the day
With glimmering rifts divide the eastern gray,
And heaven puts off the starlight from her brows,
Sing on, and cease not, for thy nested spouse
Hears and beholds thee on the flickering spray,
And I, the wreck of thought, sleep's castaway,
Drift on the swell of thy rich-flooded vows
To rest and peace. O draw me with thy song,
Draw me from out the unfathomable deep,
Wherein my soul has travailed all night long
Betwixt the worlds of waking and of sleep,
And bring me to some drowsy, dawn-lit isle,
Where the night-weary close their eyes awhile.

THE TEMPTATION.

Lift up thy voice, embittered man, and rail,
Rail on the fortune that hath used thee so :
Behold how men, not half thine equals, go
Chin-deep in luxuries that never fail,
While thou, an outcast, set beyond the pale
Of common comforts, dost thy strength bestow
On daily fight with that lean-visaged foe
Whose narrowing siege still threatens to prevail.
Alas, this struggle ! It hath cost thee dear,
For love, that should have kist thy storm-beat face,
And fame, whereof the brightness came so near,
Have played the traitor, flying off apace.
Were it not well to throw thy weapons by,
To heap the world with curses, and to die ?

THE REPLY.

Riches and fame and love,—if these were all,
These the sole mitigations of our fate,
Then might I rue this conflict, lasting late,
And shirk unblamed the summoning bugle-call.
Blind world of men ! The hero's crown and pall
Above his deeds, above himself, we rate ;
We dream too much of greatness to be great,
We scale our mean ambitions, and we fall.
To have deserved the laurels of the fight
Outshines the laurels ; to have still fought on,
When all rewardless stood forsaken Right,
Her squadrons scattered and her leaders gone,
That is the noblest. Hark ! the bugles blow ;
My comrades rally ; to the front I go.

AN APOLOGY.

The songs that I make and mend
Are only of self, you say ;
Blame me or praise me, friend ;
I can sing no other way.

The blackbird on the tree,
As he sings and shakes the dew,
Does he make his songs of me ?
Does he make his songs of you ?

Self, self, self,
Self from morn till night ;
And his songs are only sweet,
Because they are self outright.

OLD AGE.

When I no longer love to make
My little songs for singing's sake,
When I no longer mount and fly
Up with the lark into the sky,
When April with her dropping rain
Scatters no gladness in my brain,
And summer can no more unbind
The leaf and blossom of my mind,
When a maid's sweetness cannot light
With golden musings a whole night,
When in the starry heavens I see
No visions of eternity,
Then call me old, but not till then,
Though I outlast three lives of men.

THE GODS' GIFT.

To grip the sword tight when all hope is gone,
Unshaken breast the battle day by day,
And even in death fall forward, fighting on,—
That is the part that many a man can play.

But still to keep the heart fresh, still to see
A dew on all things, read in every face
The brightening legend of a world to be,—
That is the gods' gift, that the perfect grace.

THE HEIR.

A father rose from out the grave,
And stood beside his son :
'Alas, I wronged thee grievously
'When life and I were one.'

‘Nay, father, I remember well
‘Thy tenderness of old ;
‘And all I have thou gavest me,
‘My life, my lands, my gold.’

‘God save thee, lad, but in the years
‘Before thy breath began,
‘I yielded to the shameful lures
‘That tempt the growing man ;

‘And fleshly riot, flaws of will,
‘And moods of godless scorn
‘Tainted thy blood when it was mine,
‘And thou wert still unborn.’

‘Father, I love thee’ ... At the words
The spirit moaned, and fled
Back to the memory-haunted dark
That folds the sinful dead.

TO A BOY PIPING.

Pipe, while thou mayst, O happy boy,
Thy songs so true, so rare,
That cost as little pain to be
As this soft, natural air,
That from thy lips take easier birth
Than violets from the showered earth.

Pipe, while thou mayst ; the world is deaf ;
 This time is all thine own ;
Pipe in thy mirth, nor waste a sigh,
 Because thou art unknown ;
The songs that win a nation's ears
Are red with blood, are wet with tears.

Pipe, while thou mayst ; and O beware,
 When thou to love shalt bow,
That she with whom thy pipe then pleads
 Be pure as thou art now,
Nor let thy songs untuned be
By aught that shames the Muse and thee.

Pipe, while thou mayst ; for life is short,
And, ere these leaves are brown,
Death in his hands thy pipe may grasp,
And toss it rudely down,
And bring thee to the sunless shore
Where voice and pipe are heard no more.



FLOWERS IN TOWN.

You ask me why within this town,
Where all is black that is not brown,
I take the trouble still to set
My window-box with mignonette.
Well, even here the seeds unfold
A little hint of all they hold ;
The blades break out, a patch of mirth,
Upon the sombre-coloured earth,
And, as they grow, I seem to see
A new descent of Deity.
The hand that fashioned vale and hill
Makes beautiful my window-sill ;
The source from which all being runs,
The light that fills a thousand suns,
Transfigured here to mean disguise,
Within a smoky flower lies ;
And O how closer still to me
The heart of heaven appears to be,
When on some trembling leaf I view
The tears of God in drops of dew.

A CONTRAST.

I saw a beggar palsied, bent, and gray,
One who had lingered past his working day,
And, as we met, I turned my face away.

I read the last new story-book that told
Of idle love, self-tortured, as of old,
And, while I read, the tears fell uncontrolled.

SEAGULLS.

We are the souls of shipwreckt men who sleep,
Laid in the oozy chambers of the deep,
Far off from those who think of them and weep.

Creatures that haunt those wildernesses lone
Have battered on them, leaving every bone
As white as chalk is and as bare as stone.

But we, released and given to the sky,
Pass and repass with melancholy cry
Above the places where our bodies lie.

Sometimes along the channels of the breeze
We drift to landward, but our fate decrees
A swift returning to the ghostly seas.

Wailing we go, balked of our hope to win
A glance at those dear inland homes, wherein
Our bodies dwelt before the years of sin.

Wailing we go, doomed for our guilt to be
Exiled from land and weary of the sea,
Until a second death shall set us free.



THE ORDEAL.

Though thou hast a world of wit
And a heaven of graces,
Thou canst never poet be,
Till thy fate entangles thee
Fast in love's embraces.

Though of love thou singest well,
Love in sunshine lying,
Thou canst never sing aright,
Till thou learnest in the night
What love means by sighing.

THE LAND OF THE GREEN CHILDREN.

Would you see the land we come from,
You must take your staff and go
Through the shadows of the cavern,
On and on, and deep below,
Till a new wind steals about you
With a song you do not know.

You will find a dark-eyed people
Moving softly here and there;
You will see the pallid flowers
Shining through a dusky air;
You will hear the bells of churches
Ringing faintly unto prayer.

And the daylight is as twilight
In the land where we abide;
There is neither sun at noonday,
Nor star at eventide;
But a glamour broods for ever
On all that country-side.

And a mighty river rushes
By the margin of the land ;
Whence it cometh, whither goeth,
Doth no man understand ;
But we see a gleaming city
Set on the further strand.

We are dying of your sunshine ;
Let us go, that we may dream,
In our quiet darkened meadows,
Of a land of light and gleam,
Of the city lying golden
On the far side of the stream.

A NIGHT FANCY.

O nightingale, sweet nightingale,
Singing in the tree,
If thou couldst add my heart
To thine own melody,
What a poet, little nightingale,
The world would hear in thee !

THE HUSBAND TO HIS WIFE.

If I should die before you, love,
I pray you do not keep
Your woe beyond the first few tears
The world will have you weep,
But say, 'I make his heaven less
'By moaning thus in dreariness.'

And on my grave for memory
Set pansies, eyed with gold,
And tend them with those dear kind hands
That now I love to hold,
And say, 'These flowers were his last will,
'And for his sake I watch them still.'

And when the Spring that I so loved
Shall flush the land with life,
I pray you seek my quiet grave,
But not with tears, sweet wife,
And if the flowers in bloom shall be,
Say, 'Lo, he sends his love to me.'

THE LAST RITES.

O women of his house and love
Draw near, for he hath died,
And wash the body white and fair,
And bathe it in a tide
Of unguents whose perfum'd breath
Sheds April on the frost of death.

And round his hair a coronal
Set of the sweetest flowers,
And fold him in the robe you wrought
In distant, happy hours,
When he lay singing at your feet,
And watched you weave this winding-sheet.

Next, place within the fingers cold
Of him who lies asleep
No obol, but this written line,—
'For him two women weep;'
These tender words shall Charon move,
Love's passage shall be paid by love.

COUNSEL.

Sit not down with a pen in your hand,
If there's no new thought in your brain,
For the old has been said too oft and well
For us to say it again.

But if you have got a strong, new thought,
Use the first plain words; they are best;
For thought had better go forth all bare
Than die of being overdrest.

HARVEST.

Low in the dust are the leaves,
Ragged and umber and sere ;
Autumn has gathered her sheaves,
Hope is gone out of the year.

Though in the wood and the wold
Shrewd is the wind as it grieves,
Comfort is stored for the cold,
Autumn has gathered her sheaves.

God, for my autumn prepare
Grain that shall never grow old,
Fruits that shall sweeten the air
Down in the valley of cold.

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